UNITED NATIONS

Daily Highlights

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WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Croatian Government and Croatian Serbs agree to complete cessation of hostilities in Sector West and elsewhere; all United Nations personnel in Croatia accounted for and safe.

+ Security Council calls on Bosnian parties to agree to further cease-fire and cessation of hostilities without delay.

+ Security Council expresses concern at obstruction of Sarajevo airport by Bosnian Serbs; seeks safety guarantees for all UNPROFOR-supervised flights.

+ New Executive Director of UNICEF stresses commitment to making Fund as efficient and effective as possible.

+ Special Representative for Angola and Angolan Government sign status of forces agreement for UNAVEM III in Lusaka.

+ International commission of inquiry into events at Kibeho camp holds preliminary meeting in Rwanda.

+ On World Press Freedom Day, Committee on Information hears call for rededication to principle of free expression.

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The Croatian Government and the Croatian Serbs have agreed to a complete cessation of hostilities in Sector West and elsewhere, Special Representative Yasushi Akashi announced today in Zagreb. The agreement has already come into effect, but has yet to be signed. On Monday night, the Security Council demanded an immediate end to a Croatian Government offensive launched earlier that day in Sector West.

According to the agreement, civilians and soldiers who wish to leave Sector West may do so under United Nations surveillance, in conjunction with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the local Red Cross as required.

For information media—not an official record

Soldiers may leave with personal sidearms only, and must hand all other weapons over to United Nations custody.

Some 600 Croatian Serb soldiers today began surrendering their weapons to the United Nations near Pakrac, according to a spokesman for the Organization. However, four shells landed in Zagreb this morning, killing one person and wounding 50. There was one other shelling incident in Sector South this morning, but it ended before the cessation of hostilities agreement was concluded. Meanwhile, all United Nations personnel in Croatia have been accounted for and are safe.

In a related development, the Co-Chairmen of the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia have invited the Croatian parties to meet in Geneva on Friday. They have also been in close touch with the Contact Group, which met today in London to discuss the situation.

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The Security Council today expressed deep concern at the failure of the Bosnian parties to extend the agreements on a cease-fire and a complete cessation of hostilities in Bosnia and Herzegovina beyond 30 April. In a statement read out by its President, Jean-Bernard Mérimée (France), the Council called on the parties to agree to a further cease-fire and cessation of hostilities without delay. In that regard, it expressed full support for the negotiating efforts of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) and other international parties.

The Council expressed concern about the recent deterioration of the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, stressing that all attempts to resolve the conflict by military means were unacceptable. It urged the Bosnian parties to abstain from any steps that might further escalate the conflict. It reaffirmed the need for a political settlement based on the acceptance of the Contact Group Plan as a starting point.

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In a second statement on Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Council expressed concern at the obstruction of the operation of Sarajevo airport by the Bosnian Serbs. It demanded that all concerned immediately create conditions necessary for the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian supplies, and fully comply with the 1992 agreement on the reopening of the airport under United Nations authority.

The Council called on the Bosnian Serb party to guarantee the safety of all UNPROFOR-supervised flights to Sarajevo, including humanitarian relief flights. It said the obstruction of the airport was unacceptable and violated international humanitarian law.

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The new Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Carol Bellamy, today stressed her commitment to making the Fund the

best run and most efficient agency possible. She told correspondents at Headquarters that she was dedicated to meeting the external challenges of a changing world and the internal challenges of management and administrative reform. She noted that a review of the Fund had recently been completed with outside help.

Ms. Bellamy, who took office on 1 May, said UNICEF had a good track record and enjoyed the strong support of governments around the world. Much of its success was due to fact that it had been able to set out clear objectives and to fulfil them. The Fund should be accountable to donor countries. The problem of donor fatigue would force it to make efficient and effective use of financial and staff resources. Regarding the selection procedure for the position of Executive Director, she said the United States and European countries had the same goals for the Fund.

UNICEF was dedicated to the empowerment of women and children, Ms. Bellamy continued. Its policy on contraception and abortion was quite clear -- it did not provide either. She underlined the importance of children's rights, noting that 174 countries had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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The Government of Angola and Special Representative Alioune Blondin Beye today signed a status of forces agreement regarding the United Nations Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM III). A spokesman for the Organization described the signing in Lusaka, Zambia, as an extremely important step. He noted that the United Nations had experienced difficulties in several mission areas due to the fact that status of forces agreements had not been signed promptly or had not been signed at all.

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The international commission of inquiry into the recent events at Kibeho was scheduled to hold a preliminary meeting in Kigali today, according to a United Nations spokesman. The Government of Rwanda has invited Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, the United States, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) to participate in the commission. The meeting scheduled for today was preliminary because some of those countries did not yet have representatives present in Kigali.

The commission will seek to determine why the camps for internally displaced Rwandese were closed down; if there was sufficient consultation with UNAMIR before the closures; if ethnicity was a root cause of the problem; how the camps were closed; who was responsible for the events at Kibeho; and what was the role of the army and militia in the camps.

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(more)

The Chairman of the Committee on Information, Ivan Maximov (Bulgaria), today marked World Press Freedom Day by calling for a rededication to the principles of freedom of expression and the free flow of information as a means of achieving a better world. The Day was proclaimed by the General Assembly in 1993 and was observed for the first time last year. As the Committee continued its general exchange of views, speakers paid tribute to journalists who had given their lives in the performance of their duties.

The representative of France said a reduced budget should encourage the Department of Public Information (DPI) to redefine its priorities, review its budgetary choices and focus on such cost-effective areas as electronic networks. He was speaking on behalf of the European Union, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, the Slovak Republic, the Czech Republic and Romania.

Speaking on behalf of the "Group of 77" developing countries and China, the representative of the Philippines was gratified that DPI had made great progress in a cost-effective streamlining of its operations. He added that the Department should always take into account the principles of the Charter and the wishes of Member States.

Meanwhile, in a message for World Press Freedom Day, Director-General Federico Mayor of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) said it was now more urgent than ever to speak up about press freedom and tolerance. He noted that over 100 media professionals had died violent deaths last year, and that 130 were currently being held in jails.

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